(In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.)

WITH DIFFICULTY IS EASE

by

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> "Have We not expanded for you your breast and taken off from you your burden, which pressed heavily upon your back, and exalted your mention for you? So surely with difficulty is ease, with difficulty surely is ease: so when you are free, strive hard, and make your Lord your exclusive object" (The Holy Quran, 94:1-8).

Calamities are sent us only to form our character. If man were not to accept this theory of life, what other alternative is left to him than killing himself by dashing his head against a stone wall? Happiness and misery are related to each other like light and shade, and until we reach that stage of mental culture in which we are neither the slaves of passion, nor cowards in the face of trials, we shall never do any work worthy of the name. Had it been possible for us to go through the world without encountering any difficulties, we could have had some grounds for taking a different view; but as it is, whatever may be our attitude towards religion in general, this is the only possible view. We must, after all, look at facts as they are, and it will be seen that happiness and misery are simultaneously attached to our life. This being so, it follows that only that man can live in this world with a peaceful mind who takes it as a matter of course that wherever there is pleasure, there is pain also. It is this truth that is indicated by the verse, "So surely with difficulty in ease, with difficulty surely is ease."

In other words, if we long for the shifting of the back-breaking burden from our shoulders and desire that we be raised high in the estimation of the people—this latter in its turn necessitates a greater largeness of heart and a wider sympathy—then the first step must be to have a practical realization of the fact that convenience and inconvenience are complimentary to each other in our life and that they are, indeed, sent for our good. It is to emphasize the logical force of this truth that the word *fa,* meaning *so then*, has been used in the beginning of the verse under discussion—the idea being that if you seek for the facilities mentioned in the foregoing verses, then the way to them lies through your realizing the fact that facility and difficulty are inevitably linked together. Of course, a remedy was suggested for this seemingly paradoxical position by ancient Indian philosophy—and that remedy was made a part of the religious system then in vogue—to the effect that man should renounce the world and live the life of a recluse in the woods and solitary places. It is said that such was the teaching of the great sage Buddha also, to whom is ascribed the dictum that to escape the all-encompassing miseries of this world one should annihilate his own self; whereas we know from our own experience that side by side with these same miseries there is also a correspondingly great provision for our comfort and welfare in this mortal life. The Brahmins and the Buddhists have propounded this theory of life, calling it *Tyag* or Renunciation and *Nirvana* or Self-annihilation and have offered it to the world as the greatest blessing, and the only way to true salvation.

But the question remains whether any person has ever actually put this theory of life into practice. The Buddhists founded great empires for themselves. The empire of Asoka and the rule of his descendants after him all go to show that the theory of *Nirvana* was used merely as a religious theory to which the lie was unblushingly given by the actions of its followers.

Brahminism also laid too great an emphasis on renunciation; but have its followers acted on its teachings? Our Hindu friends are no whit behind other religious communities in their desire for wealth and things worldly. For centuries they have been wholly absorbed in the thought of hoarding money and it will, therefore, seem to be evident that, in practice, they have turned a deaf ear to the teachings of their ancestors in the matter of renunciation. Now, it is interesting to find that men of this kind, and it makes no difference whether they be Hindus or Muslims, show an utter lack of courage when faced with any kind of calamity. They are staggered, in the literal sense of the word, and behave like children.

The right course, therefore, is not that we should desist from acquiring the things of this world, but that we should never forget that for the practical purposes of our daily existence comfort and discomfort are inseparable experiences of life. If, on the one hand, the Hindu sages, in the records which they have left, laid special emphasis on renunciation and self-annihilation—and the religion preached by the Church also kept exhorting similar attitude towards life for several centuries since its foundation—the present civilization of the West, on the other hand, has established the hoarding of wealth as the sole object of human life. These modern Christians have become so greedy in this respect that this pursuit of theirs has come to take the place of their religious duties. The intensity of avarice which they have betrayed in torturing and exploiting the less powerful nations of the world beggars all description. This was evidently the natural reaction to the unnatural teaching of early Christianity regarding the attitude that man should adopt towards the things of the world.

But there is a very interesting thing about these slaves of the world. When brought face to face with any calamity, as I have already remarked, they show themselves to be cowards. Often they attempt or commit suicide—a cowardly exit from life—which has of late been very much in fashion in Europe and America with a frequency never witnessed in the East.

To make a long story short, the condition of worldly life is such that there is no safety in it either way, whether we renounce the world or become its slaves. Seeing that we have to pull on with the world, we are confronted with the fact that the provision made for our life is not one of unmixed comfort. Comfort is invariably linked up with a corresponding distress. It is unavoidable that we should struggle for a comfort; and at times such struggles are very keen and painful in themselves. But apart from the pain and anxiety of these struggles, there are cases of additional suffering arising from loss of what we have earned, or injury done to what we possess, and such cases are of not infrequent occurrence. For these also we have to find some remedy. Such a remedy has been prescribed by the Holy Quran alone, and it consists in making ourselves feel that whatever we earn or acquire is not for our personal use alone, but for others as well, and that our position in relation to such earnings or acquisitions is closely analogous to that of a trustee. The law may or may not entitle others to share in our earnings. That is not the point. The point is that it is our duty to look at the question from the point of view of charity and moral obligation, and regard others as co-sharers with us in all that belongs to us. It goes almost without saying that, in a general way, whatsoever we do is done for our own pleasure. So if we can form the habit of finding pleasure in the giving of a part of our earnings to others, and make our sense of satisfaction dependent on the degree of generosity and munificence which we display—and it is no more difficult to form than are other habits—then, in the event of the ups and downs of life depriving us of our worldly possessions, the misery involved will not be too great for us to bear. In a matter like this we should only try to reflect in ourselves the attribute of the Creator of the universe in His capacity as *Rabb*—a capacity in which He nourishes the whole world and gives bountifully to

everyone therein.

To sum up, in order to acquire the peace of mind, which is needed by all, we have first of all to comprehend the fundamental truth that pleasure and pain are like light and shade; and that we should be independent of the fascination of the one as well as of the menace of the other. Having taken our stand on this truth, our next step should be to labour day and night to earn and dedicate the things earned to the Maintainer of the world; or, in other words, to spend them on His creatures. It is this ordinance which is implied in the verses, "So surely with difficulty is ease, with difficulty surely is ease; so when you are free, strive hard, and make your Lord (*Rabb*) your exclusive object."

This may be paraphrased thus—Bear in mind that difficulty is a necessary adjunct to ease and comfort; when you realise this, and are free from the confusion caused by this problem, put forth your labour and apply your energy to the full; and finally make yourself the servant of your Lord (*Rabb*), that is, spend your earnings for the benefit of His creatures in the same way as He is ministering to the needs of you and them. What service can a man who has no money render to others? One who retires to the woods and hills and turns a hermit becomes a burden upon others because he stands in need of their giving him out of their earnings by way of charity. If you wish to become exalted in the eyes of people far and near, and thus see the fulfilment of the verse, "And exalted your mention for you," in your own life, keep your hands ever open in generosity; but this will be impossible for you so long as you do not earn money with infinite pains and hard struggles (strive hard). The Holy Quran, by saying, "(Have We not) exalted your mention for you and taken off your burden, which pressed heavily upon your back," only unfolds the truth that no calamity can make its burden felt upon a person who leaves no room in his mind for any sense of loss as such. Losses and their species—as enumerated in the Holy Quran—are destruction of wealth or other property, and like misfortunes of a material kind. Says the Holy Quran: "And We will most certainly try you with somewhat of fear and hunger and loss of property and lives and fruits; but give good news to the patient, who, when a misfortune befalls them, say: Surely we are Allah's; and unto Him we shall surely return" (2:155-156).

Now, when we of our own free will give away the fruits of our earnings to others, and leave nothing thereof for ourselves, what difference does it make whether any part of it remains with us or is taken away from us by the revolution of time, or the changes and chances of life?

Perhaps someone will remark that these are but words of consolation. To such a one I will say—let him see for himself if it is or is not the real position. We are, doubtless, all of us, desirous of comfort and ease, and we cannot, in any circumstances, escape loss and sorrow. And since this is so, does the remedy lie in the course followed by the hermits of Hinduism or even in that adopted by the Mammon-worshippers of the West? It is evident that in either of these, incidents untoward and unexpected have to be faced. Real comfort, I repeat, can come only to him who earns with the utmost effort and gladly shares the fruits of his earnings with others. This is the only way in which a man can be free from the griefs and sorrows of life. Moreover, such a course, manifesting as it does the benevolence of his heart, will make his name renowned and of good report among men.

One thing more I should like to say in this connection. God revealed the words, "And exalted your mention for you," to the Holy Prophet at a time when he was living the life of a recluse. But what an astounding prophecy was contained in those few words! The honour and

importance which the Holy Prophet—a fugitive from his people—attained on the day of his victorious entry in Mecca was only the beginning of that ever-widening sphere of fame that was destined to be his, and the promise of this was contained in this short verse. By the will of God that Divine promise has been ever-revealing new significance with the passage of time, and will continue so to do in the time to come.

Not a century since the Prophet's death passed but has witnessed his fame manifested in a form more glorious than ever before. Of course we had to experience a time when the enemies of the Prophet considered it their religious duty to abhor and vilify his name. But slowly and by degrees circumstances have taken a different turn, and at the present time it is difficult to say if any aspect of civilization—political, moral, cultural, economic or social—is uninfluenced by the teachings of the Prophet of Arabia. Let anyone who will examine the highest principles of culture, see if the ablest and most illuminative exponent of these has not been that unlettered Prophet of Arabia, who was told, when still living in obscurity, that his name would be made famous. Our own age is the most suitable of all for witnessing a manifestation of the glory of this Divine prophecy. In this age the people of the world are sick of religion in general. And to be quite candid, the things which people understand by the word "religion" are such as ought, in the best interests of humanity, to be renounced. The world is now determined on new achievements and continuous progress in the various departments of life, and it requires a religion, the principles of which will produce this desired success and progress.

Corresponding to this world-demand, the advent of Islam was destined to give a lead to humanity in its path of progress. The very purpose of the revelation of the Quran was the advancement of humanity. In the words of the book, “These are on a right path from their Lord and these it is that shall be *successful*” (2:5).

And if we examine the methods adopted by the world of civilization and culture, we shall find that they are the same as those enunciated in the Holy Quran. But this fact is as yet unknown to many. It is our duty to make it known. I have attempted to do my part in my book, *Islam and Civilization.* When we have duly discharged this urgent duty of ours, the Western world is sure to sing the praises of the unlettered Prophet of Arabia and demonstrate anew the truth of the verse, "And exalted for you your mention."

Let us turn our eyes to India, as well. Here our Hindu compatriots have grown sick of their religion of the *Shastras,* and are gradually adopting the principles of Islam in their practical life. It is most desirable that our Muslim preachers should act intelligently and tactfully at a time like this, and take hint from the psychological changes at work there. Only by so doing can they see the exaltation of their Prophet's name in India as well as in the rest of the world.

I have a few more words to add here which owe their origin to inspiration. It comes to me that the prophecy, "and exalted for you your mention," has been fulfilled in another and a most marvellous way. Is it not a fact that the Muslim call for prayer is now heard in all the countries of the world, not excepting those of Europe and America, five times a day? The muezzin ascends to the top of the minaret and from there proclaims at the top of his voice, among other things: “*I bear witness that surely Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah.*” Is this not the most dignified way in which a person's name can be exalted? Is this not a literal fulfilment of the Divine promise? But there is another custom in Muslim countries which all the more enhances the glory of the Prophet's name, owing to the frequency of its observance. The custom is that when the name of the Prophet is mentioned, a Muslim invariably repeats

what in Muslim parlance is called the *Darud*, that is, a prayer of blessing for him, and which is as follows:

> "O Allah! Exalt Muhammad and the followers of Muhammad as Thou didst exalt Abraham and the followers of Abraham, for surely Thou art Praised and Magnified.
>
> O Allah! Bless Muhammad and the followers of Muhammad as Thou didst bless Abraham and the followers of Abraham, for surely Thou art Praised and Magnified."

In this way several million times a day the Prophet's name is exalted in glory as a matter of course. Does any man in the world possess a like blessedness of memory? How subtle are the ways of the Lord in fulfilling His promises to His true servants!

O Allah! Bless Muhammad and his followers! *Amen*!